

**Statement of Chairman Daniel K. Akaka**  
**“D.C. Public Schools: Taking Stock of Education Reform”**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,**  
**and the District of Columbia**  
**Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

**July 23, 2009**

Thank you for joining us today as this Subcommittee continues our examination of reforms in the District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) system.

As many of you know, before being elected to Congress, I was a public school teacher and a principal in my home State of Hawai‘i. I care deeply about providing high quality education for all of our children. I also appreciate the challenges facing any educational system, and the hard work it takes to initiate and monitor reforms.

I know you all have been working hard for the past two years to implement far-reaching reforms in the D.C. school system. There is much left to do, but I understand that change does not happen overnight. I want to commend you on your efforts and achievements so far. In the first year of reforms, elementary and secondary school students in DCPS saw between an eight and eleven point increase in their math and reading scores on the District’s annual Comprehensive Assessment System exam (DC CAS). Recently released DC CAS scores for the 2008-2009 school year show continued improvements in math and reading scores for elementary and secondary schools in the District.

I commend DCPS for working to bolster the quality of its workforce by investing in its teachers and principals. DCPS is offering coaching to new and struggling teachers and providing workshops and instruction for principals. Additionally, DCPS is instituting individual performance evaluations for DCPS employees at all levels.

While these improvements are encouraging, problems persist. Despite widespread school restructuring efforts, the 2008-2009 DC CAS scores show a four percent decrease in the number of schools achieving adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. D.C. also continues to find itself on the Department of Education’s high-risk list because of poor Federal grant management.

Given the challenges and pressing need to reform the District’s schools, Senator Voinovich and I asked the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a short-term and long-term review of D.C.’s education initiatives and to make recommendations for improvements.

Last year, this Subcommittee held a hearing to examine the results of GAO’s short-term study. We learned about efforts to improve student achievement and DCPS’s physical infrastructure, as well as a number of other initiatives that were just beginning to take root.

Today, we will hear the results of GAO’s long-term study, which focused on the District’s efforts to improve academic achievement, strengthen the quality of teachers and principals, develop long-term plans, and improve accountability and performance throughout DCPS.

GAO has two primary recommendations for D.C. to ensure the effectiveness of education reforms and build upon past efforts. The first is to increase institutional and community stakeholder involvement in education policy planning. I agree that systematic stakeholder involvement is important; it adds valuable input for shaping the reforms and encourages community-wide commitment to progress.

(OVER)

GAO's second recommendation is to link individual performance evaluations to DCPS's strategic goals and initiatives. This is recommended not only for teachers, but also for central office employees. Linking individual performance to DCPS's goals will strengthen accountability and align employee performance with the agency's mission.

We are two years into the reform and there is no less urgency to improve DCPS. Great strides have been made, but we have a long way yet to go. The 2009-2010 school year will soon get underway, and expectations of parents, teachers, the community, and most importantly, the children, are high.

I hope today we can gain a better understanding of the progress made, the challenges ahead, and the steps D.C. is taking to overcome these challenges.

-END-